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The value of national dendro meetings: By participants of the 2017 UK Dendro Meeting

Ulf Buentgen (2018). The value of national dendro meetings: By participants of the 2017 UK Dendro Meeting. *Dendrochronologia*, 48, 30-31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dendro.2018.01.003>

Published in:
Dendrochronologia

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
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The value of national dendro meetings

On behalf of the UK dendro-community

For submission as a short ‘*Communication*’ article to *Dendrochronologia*, 18 December 2017

From the 4–5 of December 2017, the first United Kingdom-wide dendro meeting was held at the Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, attracting 28 participants. The goal was to gather as many as possible of the UK’s dendrochronologists for a day of discussion and familiarization. With talks covering a variety of topics – from archaeological dating, to the highly technical and exacting analysis of annually resolved, isotopic concentrations in tree rings – the meeting provided a unique opportunity for participant exposure to the diverse ways in which different tree-ring data and techniques are used; as well as the breadth of dendrochronological expertise that currently exists in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. By the end of the day, all agreed the meeting positively contributed towards bringing the UK dendro-community closer together, and welcomed the suggestion of convening more regularly.

Today, UK dendrochronologists are nearly equally divided amongst private practitioners using tree-ring measurements for archaeological and historical dating, and those affiliated with academic institutions using dendrochronological data and methods in various aspects of archaeology, climatology and ecology. In addition, the dendrochronological challenges have changed. As archaeologists and historians delve into more exotic and rare material, of disparate provenance, and researchers develop improved analyses and reconstructions of greater spatial and temporal extent, more than ever before there are opportunities for collaborations of significant mutual benefit.

Like many countries, public and private support for tree-ring research in the UK, whether for climate reconstructions or construction histories, is becoming decisively more challenging to obtain. In response to this changing environment, underlying much of our discussion, were steps we as a “national group” could take to be more collaborative to make proposals more competitive. Amongst the many suggestions there was agreement to create a national protocol for the conservation of samples and their measurements – be it jointly or independently – as well as a practice for objective, peer-to-peer, review of cross-dated measurements. That such a suggestion would come up in a group of high intra-discipline diversity is testament to how familiar the UK’s dendro-community has become, not only with the material they work with, but amongst themselves as well. The archiving of data serves the purpose of long-term security and provision for the next generation of dendrochronologists. Both, physical and digital archives, housed in an agency chartered to protect natural and historic environments, as well as the intellectual property of contributors in perpetuity, would be acceptable to the majority, if not all of the participants.

One of the more pressing topics that came up at this meeting was the future fate of UK dendro-archaeology and -history, in particular how existing expertise and materials will be passed to the next generation. Coincidentally, the situation in the UK is not unique. In many European countries, prominent dendrochronologists, who started their careers and businesses some 40 years ago, are also approaching retirement. It was suggested increased collaboration with academia, with its educational mandate and relative immutability, be considered a valuable asset for attracting and training the next generation of “us”. The inclusion of applied dendrochronology in UK curricula, with elements that include participation by the private sector, museums, and dating services, and the creation of mentoring partnerships amongst these associates, would benefit both the professional and academic branches of our discipline, increase public awareness, and raise the status of dendrochronology in the UK as a whole.

Given that most national funding agencies operate in conjunction with their national educational systems, initiatives that address a perceived loss in national expertise could be a positive attraction.

This first UK dendro meeting was warmly received and gathered groups and individuals who otherwise rarely meet. As a result of having the occasion and time for extensive discussions, the meeting offered participants a rare opportunity to explore novel collaborations and create supportive channels of communication between those who know each other less well. The meeting further improved professional courtesy and respect amongst its 28 participants from 18 different institutions. From the response of this initial event we envision similar meetings in other countries would be equally well received. We propose this type of meeting be a complement, rather than an alternative, to international conferences such as TRACE, Euro- and WorldDendro that draw a more international attendance and often have a more topical prospectus. We believe national meetings should be as inclusive as possible, and that they contribute towards increasing the visibility of dendrochronology.

In closing we wish to express our deepest regret and sorrow over the recent loss of one of the World's greatest dendrochronologists: Professor Keith Briffa. Many more pages than afforded here would be needed to only summarize Keith's contributions to our discipline. As a scientist, friend, and avid supporter of tree-ring research in the UK and abroad, Keith's lovely British-wit and scientific brilliance will be sorely missed.



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73 *Neil Loader, Rob Wilson, Coralie Mills, Annemarie Eckes, Martin Bridge, Ulf Büntgen,*

74 *Rachael Turton, Tom Melvin, Paul J Krusic, Fredrik C Ljungqvist, Mary Gagen, Alison Arnold,*

75 *Alma Piermattei, Robert Howard, Tim Osborn, David Brown, Roderick Bale, Giles Young,*

76 *Mike Baillie, Andrew Martin, Ross Cook, Anne Crone, Iain Robertson, Cathy Tyres, Nigel*

77 *Nayling, and Dan Miles (from left to right), representing the UK dendro-community at its*

78 *meeting held at Cambridge's Department of Geography, 4–5th December 2017.*